

## Turkey PM's party crumbles

AFP, Ankara

The party of ailing Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, who is barely clinging to power after a mass high-level defection that has plunged the country into chaos, continued to hemorrhage on Saturday.

The veteran leader has rejected persistent calls for him to quit and call early elections despite a direct challenge from his charismatic former foreign minister Ismail Cem, who has announced the formation of a rival political party.

But 77-year-old Ecevit -- who has been off work due to illness for the past two months -- may have no choice but to stand down if his shaky three-party coalition government loses its parliamentary majority.

## Old habits die hard

AFP, Hong Kong

More than 50 percent of Filipino's have confessed to indulging in unhygienic habits in public, with over half admitting to being spitters, although the Taiwanese are Asia's champion nose pickers, a survey found Saturday.

In spite of the foul habits, that included trimming nails in public and coughing without covering their mouths, the majority of those polled agreed that the practices were not publicly acceptable and posed a health hazard, according to a survey of six Asian countries by Asia Market Intelligence.

The survey found that 51 percent of Filipino's admitted to indulging in at least one unhygienic habit, compared to 42 percent in Indonesia, 41 percent in both Malaysia and Taiwan, and 38 percent in Hong Kong.

## Thousands pouring into Berlin for Love Parade

AFP, Berlin

Thousands of "ravers" were pouring into Berlin for the techno Love Parade festival Saturday but organisers expected fears of a terrorist attack to cut into attendance at the usually million-strong summer rite. Parade manager Fabian Lenz said "thousands" may stay away but he still expected a huge turnout.

Police said they had taken eight people in for questioning Friday in raids on four apartments and three businesses in Berlin after a tip about a possible attack.

The Berlin police said in a statement that the suspects were seven men and a woman, aged from 17 to 64 and including three Algerians, two Yugoslavs, a Lebanese and two people identified as stateless.

## Troops recover 833 kilograms of explosives in Kashmir

AFP, Kashmir

Security forces in Indian-administered Kashmir recovered 833 kilograms (1,833 pounds) of explosives but it was unclear whether the cache was connected to the region's ongoing insurgency, police said Saturday.

The explosives were discovered on a horse-driven cart late Friday near Bijbehara township, 45 (26 miles) south of Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar, and from several homes, police said.

The cart, which had three men on board, was stopped for a routine search by paramilitary units when the explosives were discovered.

# Politicians cry foul as Musharraf justifies military's role

AFP, Islamabad

Political parties Saturday slammed President Pervez Musharraf's plan to give the army a domineering role in politics that would leave a government elected in October polls at the mercy of the military.

Musharraf in a televised address Friday night proposed a National Security Council (NSC) comprising civilian leaders and military top brass with powers to sack the national assembly and prime minister.

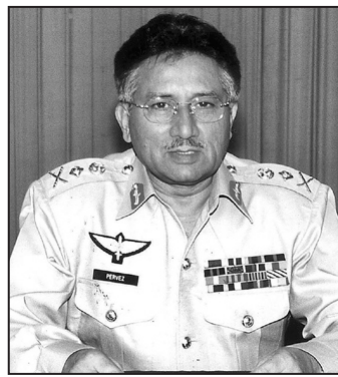
The powerful 15-party Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD) said the plan will turn future parliaments into orphanages.

"It is a joke in the name of democracy," ARD chief Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan told AFP. "We completely reject this. This is mutilation of the 1973 constitution which was passed unanimously by an elected parliament."

The fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami dismissed as a blatant lie Musharraf's repeated assertion Friday that he was not a "power-hungry" man.

"Institutionalising a military-led National Security Council will be a fatal blow to democracy. It will reduce the future elected governments to a complete farce," Jamaat spokesman Mansoor Jaffer told AFP.

The military ruler who seized power in a bloodless coup in October 1999,



repeatedly denied in a 70-minute speech Friday that a set of constitutional amendments were aimed at making himself all powerful. Musharraf argued that an institutional check by way of the National Security Council will ensure that crises are prevented and the military does not have to intervene directly as it had done in the past.

"I am even giving the power to dismiss the national assembly, cabinet and the prime minister to the National Security Council ... I'm not leaving it to the personal whims and wishes of one person."

Musharraf said the council would "exercise checks on the government and there would be no intrusion on the working of the government."

However it would be empowered to declare states of emergency as well as sack the prime minister, cabinet and parliaments at national and provincial levels.

"Now I ask, am I taking the powers or giving powers?" "After October elections, all the executive powers, which will be real power, will be handed over to the prime minister of Pakistan."

"Even the power to dismiss the national assembly will not be with me but the National Security Council."

## US sees drop in Kashmir infiltration

### Washington-Delhi hold new round of anti-terror talks

PTI, Washington

Ahead of Secretary of State Colin Powell's visit to India and Pakistan later in July, US has said that there is a "significant decline" in cross-border infiltration of terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir and urged New Delhi to take more steps to de-escalate the situation.

"There has been some easing of tensions, there has been a significant decline in the level of infiltration," US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said on Friday.

He said Washington also wants to see "a continuation of steps on the Indian side to ease off and de-escalate the situation". "We want to keep the momentum going towards easing of tensions and we want to keep on the agenda the issue of dialogue, which is that ultimately these questions will be resolved."

Boucher said Powell will tour India and Pakistan on July 27 and 28 to persuade the two countries to settle their differences and this would be followed by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage's visit to the region next

month.

He said Washington would like to see the decline made permanent as conveyed by Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf. "Now, President Musharraf has said that that's a permanent change. He's made that commitment to us and we've conveyed it to the Indian Government. And we all want to see that happen, that this does remain a permanent change."

Boucher said US also continues to look for action that both sides can take to move the process forward, "such as closing the camps and

groups". Meanwhile, the United States and India have pledged to redouble their efforts to battle the al-Qaida network, after senior counter-terrorism experts from each side met for two days of talks in Washington.

In the fifth meeting of the US-India joint working group on counter-terrorism on Friday, the two sides highlighted their bid to deepen intelligence cooperation, which has accelerated since the September 11 attacks on New York and the Pentagon.

## Lankan FM to deliver Indian message on trip to Pakistan

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, Tyrone Fernando, will deliver a message from India to Pakistan as he engages in shuttle diplomacy to ease tensions between the nuclear-armed rivals, officials said Saturday.

Fernando will leave Sunday on a three-day visit to Pakistan and hand a message to Pakistani Foreign Minister Inamul Haq from his Indian counterpart, Yashwant Sinha, who just ended a visit to Colombo, foreign ministry officials said.

"The Indian foreign minister requested me to convey it to Pakistan that although the cross border terrorism has decreased, militant training camps are still operating," said Fernando, quoted by his secretary.

However, an Indian foreign ministry source in New Delhi denied the move.

"There was no request to Sri Lanka to carry any message to

Pakistan on India's behalf," the source said.

India and Pakistan have deployed one million troops at their common borders since December, when gunmen New Delhi says were sponsored by Pakistan attacked the Indian parliament.

After intense international diplomacy, India in June eased some sanctions on Pakistan. But it has ruled out any pullback before at least October, when insurgency-ravaged Kashmir heads to the polls.

India demands Pakistan end the flow of Islamic separatist guerrillas into its zone of Kashmir. Pakistan has pledged it will not be a "base of terrorism" but denies any infiltration is taking place.

Sri Lanka recognises UN resolutions on Kashmir and maintains that India and Pakistan have to resolve their dispute through dialogue.



A child shivers as his neighbours try to make their way through flooded streets amid more than a week of continuous monsoon rains that have battered Manila, the Philippine capital on Saturday. At least 50 people have died in the flooding brought about by a week of almost non-stop rain.

# US, UN reach accord on ICC

## American peacekeepers exempted from prosecution for a yr

REUTERS, United Nations

Resolving a fierce dispute with the United States, the U.N. Security Council agreed unanimously to give American peacekeepers a year's exemption from prosecution by a new global war crimes court.

The intense conflict pitted the United States, which opposes the International Criminal Court, against all 15 European Union nations, Canada, Mexico, South Africa, Argentina and many others advocates of the tribunal they believe the world needs to counter a future Hitler or Pol Pot.

After some three weeks of negotiations, the council on Friday adopted a compromise text that fell short of the U.S. administration's demands for blanket immunity from the court but saved U.N. peacekeeping missions from the Bush administration's threats to veto them, one by one.

Taking no chances, British Ambassador Sir Jeremy Greenstock, the current council president, had the council immediately approve an extension of the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and a smaller one on Croatia's Preatlaka peninsula.

U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte said the resolution "offers us a degree of protection for the coming year."

He then threatened supporters of the court -- virtually every ally of Washington -- if any American were ever brought before the tribunal, to be

set up in The Hague, Netherlands.

"Should the ICC eventually seek to detain any American, the United States would regard this as illegitimate -- and it would have serious consequences. No nation should underestimate our commitment to protect our citizens," Negroponte said.

The resolution asks the tribunal to allow a 12-month grace period before investigating or prosecuting U.N. peacekeepers from countries that do not support the court "if a case arises" and "unless the Security Council decides otherwise."

It expresses the council's "intention" to renew the resolution in a year but does not commit it to do so.

The International Criminal Court was set up to try individuals for the world's most heinous atrocities: genocide, war crimes and systematic human rights abuses, a belated effort to fulfill the promise of the Nuremberg trials 56 years ago in which Nazi leaders were prosecuted for war crimes.

Over the three weeks of intense negotiations, the United States had sought blanket immunity for its soldiers and civilians serving in U.N. peacekeeping missions and those approved by the world body, such as NATO-led troops in Bosnia and Kosovo. But a host of nations held out for changes.



An Indian farmer sits on a tract of parched farmland in Kursi, some 25 km from Lucknow on Saturday. A delay in Monsoonal downpours in parts of north India is worrying thousands of farmers who are waiting for the rain to irrigate their fields.

## Millions still marooned in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

Three people drowned and a cluster of villages washed away overnight by the surging floodwaters in India's northeastern state of Assam where more than a million people were marooned, officials said Saturday.

The flood situation still remains grim with the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries flowing above the danger mark in at least 13 of Assam's 23 districts, a flood control official said.

A police official said three people were swept away by the Brahmaputra's surging waters in northern Assam's Darrang district on Friday.

"A group of five villagers were trying to migrate to safer areas in a country boat when it capsized, drowning three," a police official said by telephone from Darrang's Mangaldoi area, 68 km from Assam capital Guwahati.

"Two others managed to swim to safety," he said.

Friday's deaths have brought the toll in the floods in Assam in the past fortnight to at least five. Two children were swept away earlier in the week at Majuli, the world's largest river island.

In the eastern district of North Lakhimpur, at least six villages located on riverbanks were washed away. The homes of about 5,000

villagers were completely destroyed, officials said.

"Heavy erosion took place in the North Lakhimpur district leading to a cluster of villages coming under water," Assam's Flood Control Minister Nurzamal Sarkar told AFP.

The minister said floodwaters had entered parts of the Majuli Island forcing people to take shelter on raised platforms.

The overflowing river has already gouged out a huge swathe of the embankment protecting the district headquarters of Goalpara in western Assam, leaving it on the verge of being flooded, the minister said.

## Peres postpones talks with PA

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres postponed planned talks with a Palestinian delegation Saturday, amid what sources close to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said was opposition from the hardline premier.

"The meeting will take place when the necessary preparations have been made to be sure of its success," Peres's spokesman, Yoram Dori, told AFP without elaborating on the reasons for the delay to Saturday evening's scheduled encounter.

But sources close to Sharon said the prime minister had opposed the meeting, arguing that too many talks with the Palestinian Authority risked undermining his efforts to oust Yasser Arafat.

Sharon believes the contacts should be infrequent and be restricted to humanitarian issues, the sources said.

Earlier this week, Peres held the first cabinet-level talks in months with the Palestinians, meeting new Finance Minister Salam Fayad Monday and new Interior Minister Abdelrazek al-Yahya Tuesday.

Moreover, Israel slowed down the pace of contacts with the Palestinian Authority Saturday as the army revealed it had intercepted another car bomb in the West Bank believed headed for an attack on the Jewish state.

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But the talks have prompted no let-up in Israeli and US efforts to have the Palestinian leader replaced.

On Friday US Secretary of State Colin Powell declared Yasser Arafat persona non grata and shot down a dramatic appeal from him for an end to Israel's three-week-old reoccupation of West Bank cities.

## China hones options to hit Taiwan: US

REUTERS, Washington

China is honing "credible options" to attack Taiwan and could move with scant warning against what it views as a U.S.-backed rogue province, the Pentagon said on Friday.

Beijing feared Taiwan's permanent separation from the mainland could give a strategic foothold to the United States, the Defence Department said in a report to Congress.

Winning control over the self-governing island of 23 million people would let China move outward its defensive perimeter -- a bulwark against what Beijing fears are U.S. plans to divide and Westernize it,

the report said.

Beijing considers Taiwan occupied by Nationalist forces who lost China's civil war to the Communists in 1949. Beijing says it must be united with the mainland, by force if necessary.

"China's doctrine is moving toward the goal of surprise, deception and shock effect in the opening phase of a campaign," said the Pentagon report. "China is exploring coercive strategies designed to bring Taipei to terms quickly."

Such options include possible air and missile campaigns or a naval blockade.

"With little warning, Beijing may choose to seize quickly a limited

number of key facilities on Taiwan using amphibious or airborne forces as means to compel political capitulation," the Pentagon said.

"Thanks largely to Russian arms supplies, Beijing was gaining an increasing number of credible options to intimidate or actually attack Taiwan," it said.

China's growing clout also presented challenges to "other potential adversaries, such as the Philippines and Japan," the report said. China is at odds with the Philippines and others over boundaries in the South China Sea, and Beijing opposes any expansion of Japanese power in the region.



Russian Miss Universe, Oxana Fedorova tests a fitness' tool during her visit to Royal Heritage Spa Taman Sari in Jakarta on Saturday. Fedorova, who captured her title at the 2002 Miss Universe Competition in San Juan Puerto Rico on May 29th, travelled to Indonesia acting as a goodwill ambassador in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

## India extends truce with NSCN

AFP, New Delhi

The Indian government has extended a ceasefire with a powerful separatist guerrilla group in the country's northeast by another year in a bid to end decades of violence that has claimed more than 25,000 lives, officials said Saturday.

Top leaders of the rebel Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) have also agreed to come to New Delhi for peace talks with Indian negotiators, a home ministry spokesman said in the federal capital.

"The ceasefire between New Delhi and the NSCN led by Isak Chishi Swu and Thunigaleng Muivah is due to expire on July 31," the spokesman said.

"But now it has been extended by another year."

The chairman and the general secretary of NSCN (Swu and Muivah), having accepted an invitation by the government of India, have expressed willingness to come here, after the procedural aspects with regard to their visit have been taken care of, for further talks and to

carry forward the peace dialogue," the spokesman said.

The latest round of talks between Indian government negotiator K. Padmanabhaiah and the Naga rebel leaders were held in Amsterdam this week, while previous rounds were held in a number of South Asian cities.

The rebel leaders had in the past refused to hold the talks in India as there are a number of criminal cases pending against them in the north-eastern states of Nagaland, Manipur and Assam.

Nagaland's chief minister, S.C. Jamir, told AFP by telephone that his government "sincerely welcomes" the ceasefire extension, which he hoped "would pave the way for permanent peace in the state."

"The NSCN -- or for that matter any other rebel group -- should not take advantage of the ceasefire and carry out killings and extortion," he said.

As a goodwill measure, Jamir said his government was withdrawing cases against leaders of NSCN, which is accused of blowing up part of his convoy in 1999 in a failed

assassination bid.

"For the greater interest of peace in the state we have decided to withdraw all pending cases against the NSCN leaders," he said.

The NSCN has been fighting for decades to create an independent homeland for ethnic Nagas in the northeastern state of Nagaland, which borders Myanmar, in a campaign that has claimed more than 25,000 lives.

Last year the Indian government considered extending the truce with the NSCN to Naga militants in neighboring states, but the move was scuttled amid sometimes violent protests by members of other ethnic groups who feared a "Greater Nagaland" was being created.

The NSCN split in 1988 and New Delhi has separate ceasefire agreements with the two groups.

The ceasefire agreement with the main faction led by Swu and Muivah came into being August 1, 1997 and has been renewed annually since. The first ceasefire with the NSCN's Khaplang faction was implemented last year.